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1963/10/29

MR 00-20, #71

TOP SECRET

29 October 1963

WASH HULA

PASS FOL IMMEDIATE MSG

EYES ONLY

~~TOP SECRET~~

VIA CAS SAIGON-2041 FROM AMBASSADOR LODGE DTG 29/1030Z

TO SECSTATE WASH EYES ONLY FOR RUSK, HARRIMAN, BALL, HILSMAN, HUGHES

OSD EYES ONLY FOR MCNAMARA, GILPATRIC, TAYLOR, KRULAK, MR. WM. BUNDY

WHITE HOUSE/EYES ONLY FOR MCGEORGE BUNDY

INFO CAS HONOLULU FOR ADM FELT EYES ONLY

CIA/EYES ONLY MCCONE, CARTER, HELMS

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1. EVENING 25 OCTOBER FORMER ASST MINISTER OF DEFENSE, TRAN TRUNG DUNG, TOLD CAS OFFICER HE HAD LEARNED GENERAL OFFICERS PLANNING COUP WITHIN TEN DAYS. COUP TO BE LED BY GENERALS DON, "BIG MINH," AND THAT HE UNDERSTOOD GENERAL LE VAN KIM INVOLVED AT TOP LEVEL. DUNG SAID APPARENTLY GENERALS PLANNED THE COMPLETE REMOVAL OF THE NGO FAMILY.

2. DUNG SAID THAT TO HIS KNOWLEDGE GENERALS HAD NOT YET APPROACHED CIVILIAN LEADERS. AS HE HAS PREVIOUSLY, DUNG EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN ABOUT CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS GENERALS. HE CONSIDERS MAJORITY OF GENERALS NO MORE THAN FRENCH TRAINED SERGEANTS IN GENERALS' UNIFORMS. DUNG NOTED THREE EXCEPTIONS THIS ASSESSMENT: "BIG MINH," KIM, AND PHAM XUAN CHIEU. DUNG SAID HIS CONCERN RE GENERALS WAS DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY JUNTA AND, ALTHOUGH REGIME MUST BE REPLACED, GENERALS LACKED NECESSARY POLITICAL EXPERIENCE RUN GOVT.

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3. DUNG SAID HE PERSONALLY WOULD PREFER CONSTITUTIONAL SUCCESSION AS INTERIM SOLUTION. HE NOTED VICE PRES NGUYEN NGOC THO FILLED SEVERAL REQUIREMENTS: THO SOUTHERNER, HAS GAINED A TYPE OF NEGATIVE RESPECT IN POSTURE VIS A VIS DIEM AND NHU, WAS NOT AMBITIOUS FOR POWER, WOULD DELEGATE AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY, WAS NOT AT ODDS WITH MILITARY, AND MOST IMPORTANT, WAS FLEXIBLE AND WOULD NOT FIGHT CHANGE IN CONSTITUTION PROVIDING FOR PRIME MINISTER. DUNG SAID NEXT BEST CHOICE HEAD AN INTERIM REGIME WAS PHAN HUY QUAT, WHO FROM CENTER, COULD UNIFY CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP ELEMENTS, WAS CLEAN, CAPABLE EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATOR, PROBABLY ACCEPTABLE TO MILITARY AND WOULD ALSO DELEGATE POWERS. THO PREFERABLE AS PRESIDENT, QUAT AS PRIME MINISTER, WITH STRONG CABINET NECESSARY TO SUPPORT EITHER OR BOTH, FURTHER SUPPORTED BY ENERGETIC YOUNGER LEADERS AT SECONDARY ECHELON LEVEL.

4. DUNG SPECIFICALLY SINGLED OUT TRAN VAN LY FOR INTERIOR POST, PHAN QUANG DAN, TRAN VAN TUYEN, AND PHAM KHAC SUU, ALL FOR MINISTRIES; DAN OR SUU FOR SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS, DAN OR SUU FOR CIVIC ACTION, TUYEN FOR INFORMATION. ONLY THREE EXILES WORTH CONSIDERATION: NGUYEN NGOC BICH, DUE STRONG FOLLOWING AND POPULARITY COCHIN CHINA, NGUYEN TON HOAN AS GOOD MINISTER FOR YOUTH, AND NGUYEN HUU CHAU, WHO STOOD UP TO FAMILY AND HIGHLY CAPABLE. IN CATEGORY USELESS EXILES DUNG NAMED PHAM HUY CO AND HOANG CO THUY.

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5. DUNG HIMSELF SAID WOULD NOT REFUSE SERVE IN NEW GOVT, BUT CLEAN SWEEP WAS NECESSARY AND FACT HE MARRIED TO DIEM NIECE MAY HARM NEW GROUPING. DUNG ADMITTED RESIGNATION AND ALOOF POSTURE SINCE, MAY NULLIFY HARMFUL EFFECTS OF HIS CONNECTIONS WITH NGO FAMILY. THROUGHOUT EVENING DUNG MUST MORE CRITICAL THAN BEFORE OF DIEM, NHU, MADAME NHU, AND ENTIRE NGO ENTOURAGE AND GOVT HIERARCHY. SEVERAL TIMES EMPHASIZED NECESSITY CLEAN SWEEP, NGO'S BEYOND SAVING SELVES OR COUNTRY, AND AS IN PAST WILL NEVER SINCERELY AGREE REFORMS, ESPECIALLY UNDER PRESSURE. SEVERAL TIMES DUNG TOASTED "SECOND REPUBLIC."

6. DESPITE DISCLAIMORS TO CONTRARY, IT POSSIBLE DUNG INVOLVED CURRENT COUP PLANNING ON CIVILIAN SIDE. THIS BASED ON FOLLOWING: DUNG INITIAL STATEMENT DON AND "BIG MINH" PLANNING COUP, SEEMING UNCERTAINTY RE KIM, COUPLED WITH LATER STATEMENT WHEN HE INCLUDED "BIG MINH," KIM AND CHIEU IN CATEGORY CAPABLE GENERALS; HIS STATEMENT THAT TO HIS KNOWLEDGE CIVILIANS NOT APPROACHED, LATER MENTIONING SOME OF MORE NATURAL CIVILIAN LEADER CANDIDATES. ON OTHER HAND, NOTHING DUNG SAID PROVES HE PERSONALLY INVOLVED OR HAS BEEN APPROACHED, ESPECIALLY SINCE WHAT HE SAID FOLLOWS LOGICAL LINE OF DISCUSSION AND ELICITATION.

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